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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2307  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 5701  
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8161  
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4148  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004997

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH PML-N'S JAVED HASHMI

REF: ISLAMABAD 4994

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Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In-country president of opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Javed Hashmi met with the Ambassador November 24, soon after his release from prison. He appreciated USG concern during his most recent ordeal but urged us to do more to lift the state of emergency and get the judiciary reinstated. Hashmi was energized by the anticipated November 25 return to Lahore of party leader Nawaz Sharif. Though he predicted widespread electoral fraud, Hashmi felt that, with Nawaz back, his party could compete well. Discussion of a boycott among opposition parties continues and has received front page coverage today (November 25). But Hashmi had the draft list of PML-N candidates, including his daughter, which he showed the Ambassador. Hashmi indicated that Pakistan's opposition parties had increasing contact and would be more and more likely to coordinate their actions against Musharraf. End summary.

Out of Jail  
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador met November 24 with Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in-country party president Javed Hashmi. He had been detained soon after the November 3 imposition of emergency and was released from prison on November 22. Hashmi thanked the Ambassador for her call and for the public statements of concern on his behalf by the State Department and USG generally. He noted that many lawyers, human rights activists and politicians had been recently released, but highlighted that leaders of the lawyers' movement -- Aitzaz Ahsan, Ali Ahmad Kurd and Munir Malik -- were still being held.

Nawaz To Return  
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¶3. (C) Hashmi confirmed that PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif would return to Lahore from Saudi Arabia November 25. He and the rest of PML-N candidates would likely file their nomination papers by the November 26 deadline set by the Election Commission. However, he added that, for now, the party was

still selecting/approving candidates, and Nawaz would decide at the last minute whether these candidates would submit their papers.

14. (C) Hashmi asserted that Nawaz would be able to run for a National Assembly seat, though for now, he was constitutionally barred from a third term as prime minister.

15. (C) Note: Because Sharif was convicted of "hijacking" Musharraf's 1999 PIA flight, Sharif should be constitutionally disqualified from being elected to the National Assembly. However, Shahbaz Sharif, Nawaz' brother and overall party president, said November 24 from London, "If Benazir, who too is a convict, could file the nomination, why cannot Nawaz?" Embassy is uncertain about Nawaz Sharif's eligibility to run for parliament. Former prime minister Shaukat Aziz told Ambassador November 25 that Nawaz was eligible to run because he had been pardoned, although "some lawyers disagreed" with this assessment, Aziz added. The Attorney General told PolCouns weeks ago that Nawaz had not been pardoned and was not eligible because he was still a convicted felon. Obviously, Embassy will seek to clarify this point as soon as possible. End note.

Elections: "A Mockery"

16. (C) Hashmi questioned how the international community, namely the USG, could expect the January 8 general elections to be free and fair if held under a state of emergency, and requested a stronger USG stance. He predicted that PML-N candidates would be kept from campaigning how, when and where they pleased. Hashmi criticized curbs on the media. This situation is "a mockery," he said. Hashmi added that the PML-N would demand the restoration of the judiciary and that Nawaz Sharif would never accept Musharraf as president, in or

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out of uniform.

17. (C) The Ambassador reiterated the USG commitment to lifting the state of emergency as soon as possible. She noted that The Asia Foundation (TAF) was providing 20,000 domestic observers, partially funded by the USG, and that the Embassy would send out an increased number of international observation units. She said Embassy had identified 84 historically "hotly contested" districts, and the PML-N leader was welcome to share his party's own "watch list" of districts that may have a higher incidence of electoral/voter fraud. Hashmi responded positively and committed to appointing a campaign POC.

18. (C) Hashmi claimed that he was unaware of any conditions to which Nawaz had to agree before returning to Pakistan. Nawaz would not "deal" with Musharraf, Hashmi added, even rebuffing a Saudi attempt to have the two men meet while Musharraf was in the kingdom earlier this week. In fact, Hashmi claimed that Saudi authorities informed Nawaz a month ago that he was free to go. They then requested him to stay a bit longer until issues surrounding the November 3 imposition of emergency were more settled.

19. (C) Hashmi (similar to other PML-N contacts) appeared energized by the imminent return of Nawaz: "Once he is here, it will be difficult for the ruling Pakistan Muslim League (PML) to fetch votes in the Punjab." He further predicted that the PML would start to disintegrate, adding: "It is just an arrangement not a political party."

An Opposition United?

110. (C) Hashmi said that, even in prison, he had stayed in touch with other opposition leaders, talking twice with People's Party's (PPP) Benazir Bhutto, as well as with Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) Qazi Hussain and Tehreek-e-Insaf's

Imran Khan. He had not been in touch with Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam's (JUI-F) Fazlur Rehman. Hashmi argued that Rehman was not behind the increasing violence in the frontier area of Swat. Instead, Rehman was a practical politician who should be brought to the U.S. "These people need to see your country," Hashmi recommended. Even though the U.S. gave these religious parties an issue by aligning with Musharraf, Pakistan's mass secularism would ensure that "not a single mullah would win in the Punjab," Hashmi asserted.

¶11. (C) Comment: Contrary to November 25 press reports that opposition parties, including PML-N, intend to boycott the January 8 general elections, this November 24 conversation indicates that the PML-N continues planning to contest elections, particularly in the Punjab. Nomination papers are not due until November 26, and candidates may withdraw up to December 15, so the PML-N can keep its options open. Conflicting news stories are expected since this is still an election campaign, even if under a state of emergency. End comment.

PATTERSON